

LADIES OF WELLINGTON

Sarah Line Letellier continues her series reviewing women's toilets in Wellington.

At The Balti House in Victoria St, the loos are discreetly tucked away at the back of the restaurant, down a long yellow corridor that looks industrial and abandoned.

I follow the "More toilets this way" sign on the unisex loo, around the corner, down some more long yellow corridor to another unisex loo. This loo (it's unisex so I can't call it a ladies') is painted canary yellow, in contrast to the pale yellow corridor.

The brightness is overwhelming, and the bare lightbulb adds to the intensity.

The grey lino is – as lino often is – a little shabby, but the colour is a resful contrast to the yellow.

Undoubtedly the best bit about this loo is the generous quantity of spare loo rolls. I count nine: more than enough for an emergency!

The bin is basic: simply a mammoth empty flour container big enough for a toddler to hide in.

The handwash dispenser on the wall is empty, but there is a full handwash pump under it.

It's acceptable, but such a good restaurant deserves loos that give customers a little more pampering.

Rating: Thanks for the loo rolls – 5/10.

For a special evening out



FOOD REVIEW

JOSEPH ROMANOS

The Hippopotamus restaurant, in the Museum Hotel in Cable St, is not to be approached lightly.

Fair warning: four of us ate there recently to mark a special occasion and the bill came to \$509.

It's true we enjoyed an array of wines and other liquor, and ate our way through a good portion of the menu but, for me at least, an outlay like that would occur very infrequently.

Mind you, the restaurant was fairly full, so either the recession has not hit everyone, or a lot of people are busy celebrating momentous occasions.

The Museum Hotel has a remarkable history. It was saved from demolition by Chris Parkin in 1993.

Parkin bought the five-storey 3500-tonne building and had it moved across the road when its original site was earmarked for Te Papa.

Since then Parkin has steadily built the quality of his hotel until it is now among the finest in Wellington.



The hotel's ground floor lobby/bar is worth a visit just to take in the variety of paintings, sculptures, and assorted motorbikes and ornaments.

The decor of the Hippopotamus restaurant is similarly eclectic and equally effective.

For example on one wall there are two large paintings of the celebrated Bucket Man of Wellington, Robert Jones, who died in 2003.

Though you might not expect it, they fit in beautifully with the chandeliers, elegantly panelled walls and other artwork.

The Hippopotamus offers exquisitely cooked French cuisine and the service, from the predominantly French staff, was outstanding.

It must be said the restaurant isn't afraid to build in a hefty amount of profit.

A bottle of Te Muna Craggy Range Pinot Noir, for

example, set us back \$89, more than double the price I see it sold for elsewhere.

Only one of us ordered an entree, the salmon sashimi (\$29), but we all tried it and thought it superb.

For mains our tastes ranged over the chicken salad (\$32), fish bouillabaisse with crayfish, saffron gnocchi, rouille sauce and corn croton (\$46), roasted beef fillet (\$46) and confit chicken with mushroom, onion sauteed potatoes and French-style green peas (\$41).

We ordered one side dish of broccoli and pine nuts (\$10), which proved to be ample.

The verdict on the mains was unanimous: prepared to perfection and tastefully presented.

For dessert, I went for the creme brulee (\$18). It was wickedly enjoyable. Across the table, the cinnamon panna cotta with poached pear, rasp-

berry coulis and nougatine (\$18) drew the same reaction.

But the crepe suzettes (\$20 each) were the real hit. They looked good being cooked at our table, smelt great and, to judge by the reaction of those eating them, tasted even better.

We rounded off the evening with a Haythornthwaite, Noble Gewurztraminer (\$16 a glass).

It was a truly memorable evening.

The restaurant, sited on the third floor of the hotel and with superb views of the harbour, charges as if it's special and is offering the evening of the year.

Happy that's how it turned out for us.

The Hippopotamus seats about 75 comfortably. It's open every day for breakfast and dinner, lunch Monday to Friday and high tea Wednesday to Sunday.

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